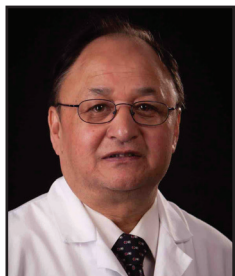




Hira-Moti (Part I)



■ Keshar Man Tamrakar

My name is Hira Man. Her name is Moti Shova. In short, Hiramoti.

When I met her, I was a young lad of 16. Likewise, she was a young girl of 16. Both of us passed SLC in the second division, 49 years ago. I appeared for the SLC from J.P. School. She was from Kanya Mandir. Both of us had the same dream, to become doctors. That is why I got admitted to a Science College. And she was admitted to the same Science College. Both of us took the same major subject Biology, which was a subject to choose if you wish to become a doctor. This was from 2024 B.S.

For the first time, we saw each other on the day of admission in the registration office. There was a huge crowd. Everyone was supposed to fill the form and submit the payment in that office. I and she were in the same line. She was a bit ahead and I was a bit behind. When she turned back, our faces looked at each other once or twice as I stood in the line. Both of us felt like smiling. But we did not talk. People were gathered in a crowd. I felt that she was shy. As she was ahead in line, she finished submitting her form earlier. I was still in line. I saw her leave. I wished she would turn back. She did not.

Studies started a week after the admission. We would pass Intermediate Science (ISc.) after studying for 2 years. Then, most students went abroad for their courses as doctors. There was a trend those days of getting scholarship to India. My aim was the same. Her desire was the same. There was only one group in ISc. Biology. That is why we were in the same class. Hira Man and Moti Shova. As we were in the same class, we started to talk. She started helping me in the lab. I had also helped before. We became very good friends. Yes, we were compatible. When we had time, we



sat together and shared our feelings. But the word 'love' never came in between us. We talked about our homes. From our talks, she came to know about my family and I hers. Even when a year was not over, we became such close friends that it seemed that we knew each other since childhood. Sometimes, we did not realize that class had started when we sat talking to each other at the college terrace. We missed our classes numerous times to talk to each other. Topics would come out of nowhere. Our talks would never end. At times, we could see how our friends stared at us.

Still, she remained silent and so did I. Both of us laughed along. In fact, she had a shy nature. She did not talk much like me. But when she talked with me, she talked more than me. She was not like that with others. At that moment too, we were still friends. We were not lovers. We had not understood the meaning of love. Even then, I saw love in her eyes. Her eyes showed love for me. I saw Moti (pearls) in her eyes when she looked at me. She must also have seen Hira (diamond) in my eyes. Eventually, we became Hira-Moti. Viewed from a different perspective, Hira-Moti would give a new definition to love. Sometimes, we heard our college friends tease us saying Hira-Moti! Hira-Moti! I realized that she felt shy when they said so. But I knew her shyness. I teased her at times telling her how the name 'Hira-Moti' would

be, just like Laila-Majnu, Romeo-Juliet and Hira-Ranjha. She used to laugh. I used to find happiness in her laugh. My happiness had no boundaries.

We became closer than necessary. I used to drop her home when we returned from college. I used to like the way her voice said 'I am going.' She did not have any kind of fear that somebody might say something. She wanted me to drop her home every day. But it did not happen sometimes. Similarly, when I went to college, I used to go by her house and wait for her to come. Sometimes when we met other college friends on the way, we used to find it a burden.

How fast did those two years pass? Our result came out on 10 Chaitra 2026 B.S. Both of us passed in the first division. I took her to Arati Sweets and fed her rasmalai. I remembered her saying that rasmalai was her favorite. So, I ordered 4 rasmalais for each of us. She was so happy that she touched me. If we were lovers, she would have hugged me and we would have shared a moment of love in our eyes. She did not admit that she loved me even though we had come so close in two years. Even I could not tell her that I loved her. Both of us were in a happy war. To me she would lose and to her I would lose. To me she would win and to her I would win. The happy war did not end. It continued.

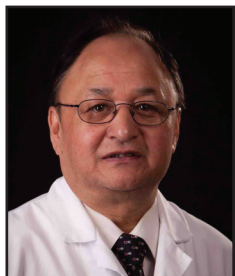
After ISc, both of us got admitted to the same college. Both of us took Botany as a major subject. We were not

in the same class for BSc (Bachelors in Science). We felt sad. Both of us went to the registration office to request them to arrange for us in the same class. They told us that the decisions had been made. So, it was not possible to change classes. Both of us came back with sad faces. As a matter of fact, our aims were to become doctors, not study in BSc only. We had just admitted ourselves in BSc classes. We had paid 250 rupees. As we studied in BSc, the Education Ministry published the list for the scholarship. There were scholarships from different countries along with the Colombo plan. Both of us filled the forms. We did not feel like going to class after we had filled the forms. We had attained good marks in ISc but again felt scared. Would they use the palace's authority and power and set us aside? We gave the interviews in the Education Ministry at Keshar Mahal.

After a week, the result of the interviews was published in the noticeboard of the Education Ministry. Both of us got scholarships for M.B.B.S. We were very happy. But a sad thing was that she got placed in R.G. Medical College. I was at Bangladesh Medical College. Suddenly, our faces turned sad. This time, I did not feed her rasmalai, but she fed me lalmohan at Arati Sweets.

After a month, both of us flew. We promised to exchange letters. We hugged each other before we separated. I felt weird. Maybe she felt the same.

Hira-Moti (Part II)



■ Keshar Man Tamrakar

Hira Man came out of his memories as his mobile phone rang. He picked up the call,

'Hello...'

'I'm Bimala...', a voice said.

Bimala was Hira Man's college friend. She was the one who used to tease Hira Man and Moti Shova.

'Oh, how are you, Bimala? You called after a long time. Are you in Kathmandu?'

Bimala Shakya used to be out of the valley many times.

'Yes, I am here. I came back from Bangkok two months ago.'

'Then did both husband and wife come here, leaving your children there?'

'Yes. I wanted to tell you something.'

'What...?'

'Your close friend Moti Shova has come to Nepal. Do you know?' Hira Man was taken aback as soon as he heard Moti Shova's name. He was just thinking of Moti Shova when Bimala called up. He suddenly asked Bimala a question,

'What did you say? Is it the vanished Moti Shova?'

'Yes, yes.'

'When did she come?' Hira Man wanted to hear about Moti Shova. Hira Man had met her once after he had come back after M.B.B.S. He did not want to see her after he noticed the red vermilion powder on her forehead. He had turned back. But today, when Bimala talked about Moti Shova after so many years, old memories pulled him back.

'When did she come?' Hira Man asked over the phone.

'One week. I called you because she wanted to meet you once. Won't you meet her?'

Hira Man could not reply. He remained silent for a while.

'Okay, if she wants to meet, why



should I say no? But where shall we meet?'

'Come to my house at 2 in the afternoon tomorrow.'

'Okay, I will come.' Hira Man hung up.

Why did she wish to meet me after so long? Hira Man asked himself.

Does she have anything to say? What would the person who suddenly forgot me have to say? Does she want to tell me that her husband is not like me? It is not possible to ask if he is like me or not. I am married too. I have children. I am almost 64. Maybe she has children too. She is also 64. I have already become a grandfather. I am getting old. Her face must be wrinkled like mine. She was so thin in the past; maybe she is fat and has become a grandmother now. Will I be able to recognize her? How would I not? Hira Man questioned himself. The face of Moti Shova from the past came and stood in front of his eyes. A fair face. Aqueous eyes. An oval face. Always a black tika on her forehead. A hard nose. Thick lips. Nobody could resist when she laughed. Sometimes she decorated herself like a Rana queen. Hira Man again got lost as he remembered Moti Shova.

Hira Man was restless for the time to strike 2. As he had applied dye a few days before, he did not have to color his white hair black. He shaved as it was four days back that he had last shaved. A beard might not give a proper look. Again, Hira Man felt energy in himself. He imagined himself as a young man of 20 years. He thought of hiring a taxi instead of walking. He had to go to Baneshwor. It would not be appropriate to walk. On top of that, his knees hurt. He could not walk for a long time. He stepped out of the house. He sat inside a taxi and instructed his destination to the driver, 'Let's go to New Baneshwor, near Everest Bank.'

The taxi started. There was a traffic jam when they reached Bhadrakali. What is this traffic jam for? Is there a protest going on? But instead of a protest, it was for the President who was headed for the airport. They had blocked the way from Singha Durbar. The taxi did not move. He looked at his watch - it was nearly 15 minutes to 2. It was 2. Then 2.15. The blocked roads were not released. The taxi fare was rising. The taxi slowly moved when it was 3pm. Hira Man felt relieved. He thought of calling Bimala. He

called her up. It was busy. He looked at his watch. 3.15. The taxi stopped at Everest Bank. He took big steps towards Bimala's house. He pressed the bell. Bimala came to the door after a while.

She stared at Hira Man.

I said 2. What time is it now?

Yes, I was in the traffic jam for an hour. Is Moti Shova upstairs?

'She had reached here at 1. She waited for a long time. She thought you would not come. So, she left a while ago.'

Hira Man's face went blank as he heard Bimala speak. Bimala spoke again as she saw Hira man's sad face.

'Let's go upstairs. You can talk to me as she has left. Moti Shova couldn't meet you but she has left a note for you.'

Both closed the door and went upstairs. Hira Man sat on the sofa. Bimala handed him a small piece of note Moti Shova had written for him. Hira Man hurriedly opened the note. Moti Shova had written two lines: I gave my son the name 'Hira'. You must also have given your daughter the name 'Moti.'

Hira man's eyes filled with tears. Then he thought to himself: Yes! you won. I lost. You have Hira. But I don't have Moti.